

RURAL SPORTS.

A

G E O R G I C.

TO MR. POPE.

WRITTEN BY

THE LATE MR. JOHN GAY.

L O N D O N,

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RURAL SPORTS.

YOU, who the sweets of rural life have known,
Despise th' ungrateful hurry of the town;
In Windfor groves your easy hours employ,
And, undisturb'd, your self and muse enjoy.
Thames listens to thy strains, and silent flows,
And no rude winds through rustling oſiers blows,
While all his wond'ring nymphs around thee throng,
To hear the Syrens warble in thy song.

But I, who ne'er was bless'd by fortune's hand,
Nor brighten'd plough-shares in paternal land,
Long in the noisy town have been immur'd,
Respir'd its smোক, and all its cares endur'd,
Where news and politicks divide mankind,
And schemes of state involve th' uneasy mind;
Faction embroils the world; and ev'ry tongue
Is mov'd by flatter'y, or with scandal hung:
Friendship, for Sylvan shades, the palace flies.
Where all must yield to int'rest's dearer ties;
Each rival Machiavel with envy burns,
And honesty forsakes them all by turns;
While calumny upon each party's thrown,
Which both promote, and both alike disown.
Fatigu'd at last; a calm retreat I chose,
And sooth'd my harass'd mind with sweet repose,
Where fields, and shades, and the refreshing clime,
Inspire the Sylvan song, and prompt my rhyme.
My muse shall rove through flow'ry meads and plains,
And deck with rural sports her native strains,
And the same road ambitiously pursue,
Frequented by the Mantuan swain, and you.

30 May 11 Thorp .cm

'Tis not that rural sports alone invite,
 But all the grateful country breaths delight ;
 Here blooming health exerts her gentle reign,
 And strings the sinews of th' industrious swain.
 Soon as the morning lark salutes the day,
 Through dewy fields I take my frequent way,
 Where I behold the farmer's early care,
 In the revolving labours of the year.

When the fresh spring in all her state is crown'd,
 And high luxuriant grass o'erspreads the ground,
 The lab'rer with the bending scythe is seen,
 Shaving the surface of the waving green,
 Of all her native pride disrobes the land,
 And meads lays waste before his sweeping hand :
 While with the mounting sun the meadow glows,
 The fading herbage round he loosely throws ;
 But if some sign portend a lasting show'r,
 Th' experienc'd swain foresees the coming hour,
 His sun-burnt hands the scattering fork forsake,
 And ruddy damsels ply the sowing rake ;
 In rising hills the fragrant harvest grows,
 And spreads along the field in equal rows.

Now when the height of heav'n bright Phoebus gains,
 And level rays cleave wide the thirsty plains,
 When heifers seek the shade and cooling lake,
 And in the middle path-way basks the snake ;
 O lead me, guard me from the sultry hours,
 Hide me, ye forests, in your closest bowers :
 Where the tall oak his spreading arms entwines,
 And with the beech a mutual shade combines ;
 Where flows the murm'ring brook, inviting dreams,
 Where bord'ring hazle overhangs the streams

Whose rolling current winding round and round,
With frequent falls makes all the wood resound ;
Upon the mossy couch my limbs I cast,
And ev'n at noon the sweets of ev'ning taste.

Here I peruse the Mantuan's Georgic strains,
And learn the labours of the Italian swains ;
In every page I see new landskips rise,
And all Hesperia opens to my eyes.
I wander o'er the various rural toil,
And know the nature of each different soil :
This waving field is gilded o'er with corn,
That spreading trees with blushing fruit adorn :
Here I survey the purple vintage grow,
Climb round the poles, and rise in graceful row :
Now I behold the steed curvet and bound,
And paw with restless hoof the smoaking ground :
The dewlap'd bull now chafes along the plain,
While burning love ferments in ev'ry vein ;
His well arm'd front against his rival aims,
And by the dint of war his mistress claims :
The careful insect 'midst his works I view,
Now from the flow'rs exhaust the fragrant dew ;
With golden treasures load his little thighs,
And steer his distant journey thro' the skies ;
Some against hostile drones the hive defend ;
Others with sweets the waxen cells distend :
Each in the toil his destin'd office bears,
And in the little bulk a mighty soul appears.

Or when the ploughman leaves the task of day,
And trudging homeward whistles on the way ;
When the big-udder'd cows with patience stand,
Waiting the stroakings of the damsel's hand ;

No warbling chears the woods ; the feather'd choir
To court kind slumbers to their sprays retire ;
When no rude gale disturbs the sleeping trees,
Nor aspen leaves confess the gentlest breeze ;
Engag'd in thought, to Neptune's bounds I stray,
To take my farewell of the parting day ;
Far in the deep the sun his glory hides,
A streak of gold the sea and sky divides ;
The purple clouds their amber lining show,
And edg'd with flame rolls ev'ry wave below :
Here pensive I behold the fading light,
And o'er the distant billow lose my sight.

Now night in silent state begins to rise,
And twinkling orbs bestrow the uncloudy skies ;
Her borrow'd lustre growing Cynthia lends,
And on the main a glitt'ring path extends ;
Millions of worlds hang in the spacious air,
Which round their suns their annual circles steer.
Sweet contemplation elevates my sense,
While I survey the works of providence.
O could the muse in loftier strains rehearse,
The glorious Author of the universe,
Who reins the wipds, gives the vast ocean bounds,
And circumscribes the floating worlds their rounds,
My soul should overflow in songs of praise,
And my Creator's name inspire my lays !

As in successive course the seasons roll,
So circling pleasures recreate the soul.
When genial spring a living warmth bestows,
And o'er the year her verdant mantle throws,
No swelling inundation hides the grounds,
But crystal currents gilde within their bounds ;

The finny brood their wonted haunts forsake,
Float in the sun, and skim along the lake,
With frequent leap they range the shallow streams,
Their silver coats reflect the dazzling beams.
Now let the fisherman his toils prepare,
And arm himself with ev'ry wat'ry snare ;
His hooks, his lines peruse with careful eye,
Encrease his tackle, and his road untie.

When floating clouds their spongy fleeces drain,
Troubling the streams with swift descending rain,
And waters, tumbling down the mountain's side,
Bear the loose soil into the swelling tide ;
Then, soon as vernal gales begin to rise,
And drive the liquid burthen through the skies,
The fisher to the neighb'ring current speeds,
Whose rapid surface purles, unknown to weeds ;
Upon a rising border of the brook
He sits him down, and ties the treach'rous hook ;
Now expectation cheers his eager thought,
His bosom glows with treasures yet uncaught,
Before his eyes a banquet seems to stand,
Where ev'ry guest applauds his skilful hand.

Far up the stream the twisted hair he throws,
Which down the murm'ring current gently flows ;
When if or chance or hunger's pow'rful sway
Directs the roving trout this fatal way,
He greedily sucks in the twining bait,
And tugs and nibbles the fallacious meat :
Now, happy fisherman, now twitch the line !
How thy road bends ! behold, the prize is thine !
Cast on the bank, he dies with gasping pains,
And trickling blood his silver mail distains.

You must not ev'ry worm promiscuous use,
Judgment will tell thee proper bait to chuse ;
The worm that draws a long immod'rate size
The trout abhors, and the rank morsel flies ;
And if too small, the naked fraud's in sight,
And fear forbids, while hunger does invite.
Those baits will best reward the fisher's pains,
Whose polish'd tails a shining yellow stains :
Cleanse them from filth, to give a tempting gloss,
Cherish the sully'd reptile race with moss ;
Amid the verdant bed they twine, they toil,
And from their bodies wipe their native soil.

But when the sun displays his glorious beams,
And shallow rivers flow with silver streams,
Then the deceit the scally breed survey,
Bask in the sun, and look into the day.
You now a more delusive art must try,
And tempt their hunger with the curious fly.

To frame the little animal, provide
All the gay hues that wait on femal pride,
Let nature guide thee ; sometimes golden wire
The shining bellies of the fly require ;
The peacock's plumes thy tackle must not fail,
Nor the dear purchase of the sable's tail.
Each gaudy bird some slender tribute brings,
And lends the growing insect proper wings ;
Silks of all colours must their aid impart,
And ev'ry fur promote the fisher's art.
So the gay lady, with expensive care,
Borrows the pride of land, of sea, and air ;
Furs, pearls, and plumes, the glittering thing displays,
Dazles our eyes, and easy hearts betrays.

Mark well the various seasons of the year,
How the succeeding insect race appear ;
In this revolving moon one colour reigns,
Which in the next the fickle trout disdains.
Oft have I seen a skilful angler try
The various colours of the treach'rous fly ;
When he with fruitless pain hath skim'd the brook,
And the coy fish rejects the skipping hook,
He shakes the boughs that on the margin grow,
Which o'er the stream a waving forest throw ;
When if an insect fall, (his certain guide)
He gently takes him from the whirling tide ;
Examines well his form with curious eyes,
His gaudy vest, his wings, his horns and size.
Then round his hook the chosen fur he winds,
And on the back a speckled feather binds,
So just the colours shine though every part,
That nature seems to live again in art.
Let not thy wary step advance too near,
While all thy hope hangs on a single hair ;
The new-form'd insect on the water moves,
The speckled trout the curious snare approves ;
Upon the curling surface let it glide,
With nat'ral motion from thy hand supply'd,
Against the stream now let it gently play,
Now in the rapid eddy roll away.
The scaly, shoals float by, and seiz'd with fear
Behold their fellows tost in thinner air ;
But soon they leap, and catch the swimming bait,
Plunge on the hook, and share an equal fate.

When a brisk gale against the current blows,
And all the watry plain in wrinkles flows,

Then let the fisherman his art repeat,
Where bubbling eddys favour the deceit.
If an enormous salmon chance to spy
The wanton errors of the floating fly,
He lifts his silver gills above the flood,
And greedily sucks in th' unfaithful food ;
Then downward plunges with the fraudulent prey,
And bears with joy the little spoil away.
Soon in smart pain he feels the dire mistake,
Lashes the wave, and beats the foamy lake,
With sudden rage he now aloft appears,
And in his eye convulsive anguish bears ;
And now again, impatient of the wound,
He rolls and wreaths his shining body round ;
Then headlong shoots beneath the dashing tide,
The trembling fins the boiling waves divide ;
Now hope exalts the fisher's beating heart,
Now he turns pale, and fears his dubious art ;
He views the tumbling fish with longing eyes,
While the line stretches with th' unwieldy prize ;
Each motion humours with his steady hands,
And one slight hair the mighty bulk commands ;
Till tir'd at last, despoil'd of all his strength,
The game athwart the stream unfolds his length.
He now, with pleasure, views the gasping prize
Gnash his sharp teeth, and roll his blood-shot eyes ;
Then draws him to the shore, with artful care,
And lifts his nostrils in the sick'ning air :
Upon the burthen'd stream he floating lies,
Stretches his quivering fins and gasping dies.
Would you preserve a num'rous finny race ?
Let your fierce dogs the ray'nous otter chase ;

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Th' amphibious monster ranges all the shores,
Darts through the waves, and ev'ry haunt explores :
Or let the gin his roving steps betray,
And save from hostile jaws the scaly prey.

I never wander where the bord'ring reeds
O'erlook the muddy stream, whose tangling weeds
Perplex the fisher ; I, nor chuse to bear
The thevish nightly net, nor barbed spear ;
Nor drain I ponds the golden carp to take,
Nor trowle for pikes, dispeoplers of the lake.
Around the steel no tortur'd worm shall twine,
No blood of living insect stain my line ;
Let me less cruel cast the feather'd hook,
With pliant rod athwart the pebbled brook,
Silent along the mazy margin stray,
And with the fur-wrought fly delude the prey.

CANTO II.

NOW, sporting muse, draw in the flowing reins,
Leave the clear streams a while for sunny plains.
Should you the various arms and toils rehearse,
And all the fisherman adorn thy verse ;
Should you the wide-encircling net display,
And in its spacious arch enclose the sea,
Then haul the plunging load upon the land,
And with the soale and turbet hide the sand ;
It would extend the growing theme too long,
And tire the reader with the watery song.

Let the keen hunter from the chase refrain,
Nor render all the plowman's labour vain,
When Ceres pours out plenty from her horn,
And cloaths the fields with golden ears of corn.

Now, now, ye reapers, to your task repair,
Haste, save the product of the bounteous year :
To the wide gathering hook long furrows yield,
And rising sheaves extend through all the field.

Yet if for sylvan sport thy bosom glow,
Let thy fleet greyhound urge his flying foe.
With what delight the rapid course I view !
How does my eye the circling race pursue !
He snaps deceitful air with empty jaws,
The subtle hare darts swift beneath his paws ;
She flies, he stretches, now with nimble bound
Eager he presses on, but overshoots his ground ;
She turns, he winds, and soon regains the way,
Then tears with goary mouth the screaming prey.
What various sport does rural life afford !
What unbought dainties heap the wholesome board !

Nor less the spaniel, skilful to betray,
Rewards the fowler with the feather'd prey.
Soon as the lab'ring horse with swelling veins,
Hath safely hous'd the farmer's doubtful gains,
To sweet repast th' unwary partridge flies,
With joy amid the scatter'd harvest lies ;
Wandering in plenty, danger he forgets,
Nor dreads the slav'ry of entangling nets.
The subtle dog scowrs with sagacious nose
Along the field, and snuffs each breeze that blows,
Against the wind he takes his prudent way,
While the strong gale directs him to the prey ;
Now the warm scent assures the covey near,
He treads with caution, and he points with fear ;
Then (lest some sentry fowl the fraud descry,
And bid his fellows from the danger fly)

Close to the ground in expectation lies,
Till in the snare the flutt'ring covey rise.
Soon as the blushing light begins to spread,
And glancing Phoebus gilds the mountain's head,
His early flight th' ill-fated partridge takes,
And quits the friendly shelter of the brakes :
Or when the sun casts a declining ray,
And drives his chariot down the western way,
Let your obsequious ranger search around,
Where yellow stubble withers on the ground :
Nor will the roving spy direct in vain,
But numerous coveys gratify thy pain.
When the meridian sun contracts thy shade,
And frisking heifers seek the cooling glade ;
Or when the country floats with sudden rains,
Or driving mists deface the moist'ned plains ;
In vain his toils th' unskilful fowler tries,
While in thick woods the feeding partridge lies.
Nor must the sporting verse the gun forbear,
But what's the fowler's be the muse's care.
See how the well-taught pointer leads the way :
The scent grows warm ; he stops ; he springs the prey ;
The flutt'ring coveys from the stubble rise,
And on swift wing divide the sounding skies ;
The scatt'ring lead pursues the certain flight,
And death in thunder overtakes their flight.
Cool breathes the morning air, and winter's hand
Spreads wide her hoary mantle o'er the land ;
Now to the covey thy lesser spaniel take,
Teach him to range the ditch and force the brake ;
Not close covert can protect the game :
Hark ! the dog opens ; take thy certain aim ;

The woodcock flutters; how he war'ring flies!
The wood resounds: he wheels, he drops, he dies.

The tow'ring hawk let future poets sing,
Who terror bears upon his soaring wing:
Let them on high the flighted hern survey,
And lofty numbers paint their airy fray.
Nor shall the mounting lark the muse detain,
That greets the morning with his early strain;
When, 'midst his song, the twinkling glass betrays;
While from each angle flash the glancing rays,
And in the sun the transient colours blaze,
Pride lures the little warbler from the skies:
The light-enamour'd bird deluded dies.

But still the chase, a pleasing task, remains;
The hound must open in these rural strains.
Soon as Aurora drives away the night,
And edges eastern clouds with rosy light,
The healthy huntsman, with the cheerful horn,
Summons the dogs, and greets the dappled morn;
The jocund thunder wakes th' enliven'd hounds,
They rouse from sleep, and answer sounds for sounds;
Wide through the surzy field their rout they take,
Their bleeding bosoms force the thorny brake:
The flying game their smoaking nostrils trace,
No bounding hedge obstructs their eager pace;
The distant mountains eccho from afar,
And hanging woods resound the flying war:
The tuneful noise the sprightly courser hears,
Paws the green turf, and pricks his trembling ears;
The slacken'd rein now gives him all his speed,
Back flies the rapid ground beneath the steed;

Hills, dales and forests far behind remain, [train.
 While the warm scent draws on the deep-mouth'd
 Where shall the trembling hare a shelter find?
 Hark! death advances in each gust of wind!
 New stratagems and doubling wiles she tries,
 Now circling turns, and now at large she flies;
 Till spent at last, she pants and heaves for breath,
 Then lays her down, and waits devouring death.

But stay, advent'rous muse, hast thou the force
 To wind the twisted horn, to guide the horse?
 To keep thy seat unmov'd hast thou the skill
 O'er the high gate, and down the headlong hill;
 Canst thou the stag's laborious chace direct,
 Or the strong fox though all his arts detect?
 The theme demands a more experienc'd lay:
 Ye mighty hunters, spare this weak essay.

Oh happy plains, remote from war's alarms,
 And all the ravages of hostile arms!
 And happy shepherds, who secure from fear,
 On open downs preserve your fleecy care!
 Whose spacious barns groan with increasing store,
 And whirling flails disjoint the cracking floor:
 No barb'rous soldier, bent on cruel spoil,
 Spreads desolation o'er your fertile soil;
 No trampling steed lays waste the ripen'd grain,
 Nor crackling fires devour the promis'd gain:
 No flaming beacons cast their blaze afar,
 The dreadful signal of invasive war;
 No trumpet's clangor wounds the mother's ear,
 And calls the lover from his swooning fair.

What happiness the rural maid attends,
 In chearful labour while each day she spends!

She gratefully receives what heaven has sent,
 And, rich in poverty, enjoys content :
 (Such happiness, and such unblemish'd fame
 Ne'er glad the bosom of the courtly dame)
 She never feels the spleen's imagin'd pains,
 Nor melancholy stagnates in her veins ;
 She never loses life in thoughtless ease,
 Nor on the velvet couch invites disease ;
 Her home-spun dress in simple neatness lies,
 And for no glaring equipage she sighs :
 Her reputation, which is all her boast,
 In a malicious visit ne'er was lost :
 No midnight masquerade her beauty wears,
 And health, not paint, the fading bloom repairs.
 If love's soft passion in her bosom reign,
 An equal passion warms her happy swain ;
 No home-bred jars her quiet state controul,
 Nor watchful jealousy torments her soul ;
 With secret joy she sees her little race
 Hang on her breast, and her small cottage grace ;
 The fleecy ball their little fingers cull,
 Or from the spindle draw the lengthning wool :
 Thus flow her hours with constant peace of mind,
 Till age the latest thread of life unwind.

Ye happy fields, unknown to noise and strife,
 The kind rewarders of industrious life ;
 Ye shady woods, where once I us'd to rove,
 Alike indulgent to the muse and love ;
 Ye murm'ring streams that in Maeanders roll,
 The sweet composures of the pensive soul,
 Farewel.—The city calls me from your bow'rs:
 Farewell amusing thoughts and peaceful hours.